Report 1925-26

LAMBIE SOUTH PLACE

I.

IT is now thirty-four years since our Church began to teach its fundamental Principle that the Ethical Ideal is the supreme object of religious veneration and that its claim upon us rests on no external authority and on no system of supernatural rewards and punishments, but has its origin in the nature of man as a social and rational being.

During the last year we have continued as usual to give expression to this Principle in our regular Sunday Services and addresses, but with more exclusive attention to the bearing of moral insight upon religious beliefs and with less attention to the ethics of current political and economic issues. Our reason for so doing has been twofold: in the first place, we are a religious and not a political or industrial organisation; and, secondly, the Brtitish public is now beginning to see not only that the foundations of social life must be ethical, but that the ethical foundations must be cherished with religious veneration, and, as never before, men are seeking light upon the relation of religion to ethics.

II.

During the year we have held five Special Services. On December 20th—our All Nations Festival—we celebrated the Locarno Pact, which has recently achieved its purpose in the admission of Germany to the League of Nations. At our celebrations, flags of Belgium, France and Germany—the gifts of Baroness de Béthune, M'lle Bonneau and other French friends, and Mrs. Stanton Coit—were presented to the Church. It was noted at the time by many who were present that the ceremony was the opposite of a flag-waving performance, and that it was religious rather than political; our seven flags were lowered upon our Altar to the Ideal of the True, the Beautiful and the Good, in token of our belief that the only enduring bond of co-operation among nations consists of practical devotion to the service of science, art and justice.

On the evening of December 31st we celebrated the ending of the year 1925 by a Service of Remembrance, at which were mentioned by name all the members of the Church who had died, as well as the great benefactors of humanity who had passed away during the preceding twelve months. At 9.30 members and friends partook of a communal meal in the Church Hall. At 11.30 we held a Watch-Night Service.

The first Sunday in February was set apart, according to our custom for seventeen years, as Woman's Sunday, in celebration of the responsibilities and achievements of women in citizenship and spiritual leadership.

The first Sunday in July being the formal anniversary of the founding of the Church, the occasion was marked by the unveiling of a beautiful stained glass window, designed and executed by Mr. E. Liddall Armitage, who is a member of the Church. It was the gift of Miss Dora M. Saxton, in memory of her parents, Captain Charles Clifford Saxton, R.A., and Mrs. Saxton. The window depicts Florence Nightingale, whose heroic spirit, in spite of all rebuffs, laid the foundations of the nursing profession as we know it to-day. It is interesting to record that many reproductions of this, as well as of our Joan of Arc window, have appeared in the public press, not only of London but of Amsterdam, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Probably no stained glass windows have ever received such general and unsolicited publicity, due in this case, no doubt, not only to the beauty and originality of the art work but also to the fact that the public welcomed a departure from the conventional subjects of Bible narrative and Church history and an appreciation of the sanctity of high character irrespective of creed.

Our thirty-fourth anniversary was not only the occasion of the unveiling of Miss Saxton's gift, but of an offer by Mrs. Stanton Coit of another window, which is to portray Elizabeth Fry and her work in prison reform. At the same time a number of donations were also promised towards a window which is to symbolise what is counted by many the greatest revolution in centuries—the granting of political suffrage to women. It was felt that this window should not be the gift of one person, but that an opportunity to contribute should be afforded to as many as possible of the actual champions of woman's suffrage.

In May last the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ethical Movement was celebrated in New York City. The delegates from the Ethical Church were Dr. Stanton Coit and Miss Adela Coit. The most permanent form in which the Ethical Jubilee was expressed was the publication of two books of essays by various leaders of Ethical Societies. The title of one is "Aspects of Ethical Religion" and of the other "The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ethical Movement." Of the seventeen essays which appear in the former, five are contributed by members of the Ethical Church (although of these, alas! three are now working in American Ethical Societies): Mr. Horace Bridges, Dr. Stanton Coit, Mr. Henry J. Golding, Mr. G. E. O'Dell, and Mr. G. A. Smith.

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ethical Movement was also celebrated at our Church by a United Service, representing all the English Ethical Societies. It was conducted by Mr. Spiller and Mr. Dimsdale Stocker, and addresses were delivered by Dr. Delisle Burns and Mr. John Murphy on behalf of the South Place Ethical Society by Mr. Harry Snell, M.P., on behalf of the Societies in the English Ethical Union, and by Dr. Coit on behalf of the Ethical Church. After the Service a well-attended social gathering was held in the Church Hall.

III.

As to the financial position of the Church, the Committee would refer members to the Statement recently sent out by the Chairman of the Committee. Here should be acknowledged, however, with special thanks an anonymous gift of fifty pounds last Spring to the Building and Organ Fund from one member, to whose identity the Committee has no clue, and gratitude should be expressed to the four members who have taken up at a lower rate of interest £500 of our mortgage, on which we had been paying 6 per cent. interest.

IV.

The Church has suffered the loss by death of three well-known members. Mr. Siddle, who had so often lectured for us, died in November, and his loss has been deeply felt. In February Mr. G. Farewell Jones, who since the founding of the Church has been its Hon. Auditor, passed away; and in the Spring we learned of the death of Professor Collin, a lecturer at Oslo University, Norway, who had been a member since 1892.

On March 17th the marriage of Miss Gwendolen Coit with Mr. Fergus Dunlop was solemnised in our Church in the presence of a large gathering; two other weddings have been solemnised during the Session.

The Church has joined the League of Nations Union as a Corporate Member. Our second Church Calendar was issued last Autumn.

The Friday Club, to which the Church is indebted for the development of its social life, is to be warmly congratulated on having closed its autumn and winter session with a record number of members, and upon having provided an excellent and varied programme of lectures, debates, concerts and social evenings. This year, as in former years, a series of enjoyable country Rambles has been organised by the Club during the Spring and Summer. Membership of the Friday Club is open to non-members of the Church.

Members will be interested to learn that our beautiful Canticles and Responsive Services are becoming known far beyond our own congregation. Several of them, including "Our Brother the Sun," "We Believe" and "The Man on the Cross" have been frequently recited by Miss Gullan's Verse Speaking Choir to large audiences both in London and the Provinces.

The Committee issues this report with a sense that our opportunity for enlightening public sentiment and of guiding private conduct aright is greater than ever before, and it calls upon the members to renew their dedication to the fundamental principle to which we have remained steadfast for a whole generation.